DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 208 738 HE 014 425

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TITLE Interracial Differences Among University Freshmen.
INSTITUTION Maryland Univ., College Park. Counseling Center.
REPORT NO UM-CC-RR-3-80
PUB DATE 80
NOTE 16p.
AVAILABLE FROM University of Maryland, Office of Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs, Counseling Center, College Park, MD 10742 ($1.50).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Aspiration; Asian Americans; Black Students; *College Freshmen; Comparative Analysis; Higher Education; Hispanic Americans; Institutional Research; *Racial Differences; Sex Differences; State Universities; *Student Attitudes; *Student Characteristics; White Students
IDENTIFIERS University of Maryland College Park

ABSTRACT

A 79-item questionnaire was administered to a sample or 1,179 entering freshmen at the University of Maryland, College Park, in a survey of interracial differences. The sample was 86 percent white, 9 percent black, and 5 percent other minority groups (largely Hispanic and Asian American). White students were found to differ from minority students on several dimensions within the areas of background, attitude, and perceptions of self and environment. In addition, black and non-black minorities were found to have differences in demographic and academic backgrounds, needs, and attitudes. Minority group students were found to be more likely than white students to aspire to an educational degree beyond the bachelor's degree. Staying in school was more likely to depend on part-time employment for all minority students than for white students. There were additional differences in financial need and anticipated retention within the minority groups. Black students were significantly more likely than white and non-black minority students to feel that if they left the university before receiving a degree, it would be due to financial hardship. While there was little agreement with the statement "I thought seriously about not going to college," non-black males disagreed the most strongly with it and non-black females evidenced the least disagreement. (Author/LB)

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INTERRACIAL DIFFERENCES AMONG UNIVERSITY FRESHMEN

Lydia Y. Minatoya and William E. Sedlacek

Research Report # 3-80

COUNSELING CENTER
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COLLEGE PARK, MARYLAND

INTERRACIAL DIFFERENCES AMONG UNIVERSITY FRESHMEN

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SUMMARY

A 79-item questionnaire was administered to a sample of 1179 entering freshmen at the University of Maryland, College Park. The sample was 86% white, 9% black, and 5% other minority groups (largely Hispanic and Asian American). White students were found to differ from minority group students on a number of dimensions within the areas of background, attitude and perceptions of self and environment. Additionally, black and non-black minorities were found to have differences in demographic and academic backgrounds, needs, and attitudes.

Minority students were found to be more likely than white students to aspire to an educational degree beyond the Bachelor's degree. Staying in school was more likely to depend on part-time employment for all minority students than for white students. There were additional differences in financial need and anticipated retention within the minority groups. Black students were significantly more likely than white and non-black minority students to feel that if they left the University before receiving a degree, it would be due to financial hardship. While there was little agreement with the statement "I thought seriously about not going to college," non-black males disagreed the most strongly with it and non-black females evidenced the least disagreement.

There is a growing awareness among student personnel administrators and college counselors that effectiveness in their roles requires active assessment and developmental intervention as well as diagnosis of problems and remediation. Parallel to this, the conceptualization of behavior as a function of the interaction between persons and their environments has emerged (Hunt and Sullivan, 1974). Efforts to apply these theoretical stances have spurred the development of environmental design. Coyne, et.al., (1979) describe environmental assessment as the analysis of an intact social unit for the purpose of understanding and possibly changing that social unit. These authors feel that environmental assessment is a valuable base from which to design applied research, consultation and program evaluation.

A dynamic model, the foundation of environmental design is perhaps the accumulation of data describing the population and its relationships with the environment. Within the college population are racial sub-groups; whether the perceptions and needs of such groups are adequately represented when the studnet is conceptualized as a prototypical average student is uncertain.

Gibbs (1975) suggests that in their efforts to adapt socially, psychologically and academically to the university, blacks experience a greater range of problems than do whites. In a comparison of problems perceived by minority and white students, Webster, Sedlacek and Miyares (1979) found a number of university environment related problems which were unique to a racial/cultural group, as well as several that were common to all students. Similarly, in an examination of Asian, Black, and Hispnaic University students, Patterson and Sedlacek (1979) found differences between these ethnic groups in attitudes, perceptions, and experiences. These findings suggest that a richer description of a population can be extracted when its component groups are examined.

The purpose of the present study was to obtain a description of the incoming freshmen class at the University of Maryland, College Park, (UMCP), by examining similarities and differences among racial/ethnic groups.

METHOD

A seventy-nine item questionnaire surveying demographics, behavior, and attitudes was administered to a sample of the 1179 freshmen entering the University of Maryland, College Park. The sample was 86% white, 9% black, 3% Asian or Pacific Islander, 2% Hispanic and .3% Native American. The sample was considered to be representative within each race and sex group of UMCP entering freshmen.

Nominal data were analyzed descriptively and by chi square, attitudinal items by analysis of variance. For purposes of analysis, Asian/Pacific Islanders, Hispanics, and Native Americans were combined. All differences noted below were significant at the .05 level.

RESULTS

Academic Background and Expectations

All racial groups stated that the geographic location and the quality of a particular academic department were important reasons for choosing UMCP. While white students also frequently mentioned the relative inexpensiveness of the institution, minority students were more apt to cite the overall academic quality of the institution. The whites, blacks and other racial/ethnic groups also chose learning skills directly applicable to their career goals as their most important educational objective. Deciding on a career goal and becoming independent in thought and behavior were also often mentioned educational objectives. Blacks frequently mentioned the improvement of their self-understanding as their major educational objective.

Chi square analysis revealed that blacks, whites, and other minorities differed significantly (.05) in their academic degree aspirations. While 29% of the blacks and other minorities intended a B.A. to be the highest degree they sought, 45% of the white students intended a B.A. to the highest degree they sought. Conversely, 14% of the whites intended to obtain a doctoral or medical degree as compared to 29% of the blacks and other minority group members.

In reporting their average high school grades, significant differences were also noted among groups. The median high school grade of black students was 3.0, of other minority group students 3.11, and of white students 3.14. There was also a difference in how many hours a week the different racial/ethic groups had studied on the average. Whites studied an average (median) of 4.2 hours per week, while blacks studied 5.5 hours per week and other minorities 7.4 hours per week.

Black (33%) and white (22%) students felt that their weakest academic area was math. This differed significantly from other minority students, of whom only 8% felt math to be their principal academic weakness. For these other minority group students, study habits (25%) were perceived as the area of greatest academic weakness.

Living Arrangements and Financial Background

Blacks (65%) and whites (52%) were significantly more likely to be living in university residence halls than were other minorities, of whom 48% were living with parents and guardians. Twenty four percent of the non-black minority students expected to commute 11-50 miles each way to campus. Perhaps because of this distance from campus, most non-black minority group members did not expect to identify with any formal campus groups during their freshmen year. White students (13%) were significantly more likely than black students (3%) to

expect to be most identified with a fraternity or sorority. Blacks (11%) were more likely to expect to be most identified with campus academic groups than whites (4%) or other minority group members (3%).

Black students (51%) more frequently grew up in a city than did other minorities (21%), who in turn more frequently grew up in a city than whites did (7%). The reverse pattern emerged for having lived most of their lives in a suburb, with 77% of the whites, 68% of non-black minority members, and 36% of blacks having spent most of their lives in the suburbs. Sixty-three percent of the whites and 42% of the blacks had been raised in neighborhoods that were 90% or more same race. More than half of the non-black minorities students reported having grown up in neighborhoods that were less than 5% same race.

Staying in school was significantly more likely to depend on part-time employment for all minority students than for white students. Of the students who needed to be employed part time, blacks (38%) more often needed to earn more than $50 per week than other minorities (29%) or whites (19%). Not surprisingly then, minority students were significantly more likely than white students to work in federally funded work study programs or other on-campus jobs. Minorities reported needing to earn more money and also reported having earned less money in the past year than white students. Forty-one percent of white students, twenty-seven percent of non-black minority members and fourteen percent of black students stated that they had earned over one thousand dollars during the past year.

Personal Philosophy

Blacks most frequently felt that friendships had contributed the most to their personal development during the past year (22%). Whites (28%) most often cited social life (dating parties, etc.). Other minority group members cited both social life (24%) and job experience (24%) most often as the principal contributor to their personal development.

Whites and other minorities were more likely to go to art galleries or exhibits than blacks. Mean yearly attendance was 2.48 for other minorities, 2.32 for whites, and 1.10 for blacks. Also, other minorities were more likely to go to musical concerts or recitals (4.97 per year) than were whites (2.76) or blacks (2.41).

Forty-four percent of the black students, 33% of the white students and 30% of the other minority group members said they attended religious services weekly or more often. Seventy-six percent of the black students, 64% of the white students and 65% of the other minority students felt that their personal or religious philosophy was an adequate guide for their outlook and behavior. Many students described their political position as "middle of the road" (32% blacks, 39% whites, 37% other minority) with blacks (39%) seeing themselves as liberals more often than Whites (28%) and otherminorities (24%).

Career

When asked what was the most important component in their long term career choice, blacks cited (in order of frequency): high anticipated earnings (21%), work with people (18%), and job openings usually available (15%). The order of frequency of responses to the same question for white students was intrinsic interest in the field (19%), rapid career advancement possible (14%), and high anticipated earnings (14%). Non-black minority students cited job openings usually available (22%), intrinsic interest in the field (17%) and high anticipated earnings (14%).

Black students (32%) were significantly more likely than white students (12%) and non-black minorities (15%) to feel that if they left the university before receiving a degree it would be due to financial hardship. Blacks were also significantly less likely (1%) to feel that if attrition occurred it would be due to disinterest in study (whites 10%, other minorities 10%). All groups most often stated that if they remained at the university to complete a degree,

the principle reason would be that a degree was requisite for their chosen profession. The students' main source of knowledge about possible career choice seemed to be written materials (29%) fathers (21%) and high school teachers and counselors (11% each). Fathers (26%) were also most often mentioned specifically as career role model, followed by mothers (14%) and friends (19%). However, 30% of the students mentioned that another unspecified role model was most influential.

Attitudes Toward Self and Environment

Blacks felt most strongly that the university should actively recruit black students (Table 1). Other minority group members were more uncertain about their understanding of human sexuality than Black and Whites. Non-black minorities were also more interested in improving their writing skills and more expectant that the university would provide adequate student parking than the other groups. Whites felt that UMCP was a party school more than minorities did. Black students were the least interested in seeking emotional-social counseling, and least likely to imagine themselves dropping out of school before completing a bachelors degree.

Women were more apt to have attended plays (yearly mean 1.77 vs. 2.67) and art exhibits (yearly mean 2.47 vs. 3.23) in the past year than were men, but were less apt to expect to participate in intramural sports at the university (Table 2). The active recruitment of black students by the university was viewed more favorably by women than by men. While interest in improving writing skills was less intense for women than for men, men felt more confident of their knowledge about how to use a library than women. Men also had higher expectations of certain educational aspects of the university than did women. Men had more intense expectations that class assignments would be fully explained and that instructors would act like they care about the student. Men

expressed more agreement than women with the statement that "getting good grades in a course is more important to me than the content of the course."

As shown in Table 3, there were three items which reflected significant differences by race and sex. Black males believed most strongly that the university should actively recruit blacks. While there was little agreement with the statement "I thought seriously about not going to college," non-black minority males disagreed the most strongly and non-black minority females evidenced the least disagreement.

DISCUSSION

There has been a tendency to view cultural diversity as a generic term. Thus diversity within the category "minority" has traditionally been obscured. Analyses of the results of the present study suggest that not only do minority and white students differ, but also that whites, blacks, and non-black minority students experience different concerns, in different degrees, and with different consequences. For example, to stay in school, minority students, particularly black students, are significantly more likely to depend on part-time employment than are white students. Despite this financial hardship, black students were most likely to feel they would not leave college before obtaining a a degree, while non-black minorities were significantly more likely than blacks and whites to envision leaving school before completing a degree.

For those concerned with retention and with the quality of life for those students retained, it seems important that investigations of differences among minority groups continue. Too frequently, minority and white students share classes and little else. In its efforts to understand and alter this pattern, higher education has displayed a pardoxical tendency to view cultural diversity as a single entity. That is, programs have been planned and evaluated with the assumptions that: 1) minority students share a common dissimilarity from white students, and 2) that these unitary differences can be addressed by broad encompassing strategies.

The present research suggests that the preparation, aspirations, and expectations with which students enter a university may differ significantly by racial/ethnic group. An important next step in obtaining a finer picture of the needs of minority students is systematic research on specific subgroups. The present study found that black and non-black minorities differ significantly on several important dimensions. Perhaps further examination of the groups comprising non-black minorities (in this case Hispanic and Asian Americans) will reveal other differences important for policy making and program development.

It seems important not only to examine the experiences of minority students at predominantly white universities, but also to examine universities' receptivity towards racial/ethnic subgroups. Assessing the environment may suggest approaches to developing programs which enhance the viability and the quality of student life for minority students. Environmental assessment may also be a useful means for diagnosis of subtle environmental resistences to viewing cultural diversity as enriching.

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Table 1.

Significant Differences* in Attitude Items by Race

Item	Black		White		Other	
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
1. The Univeristy should actively recruit black students.	2.04	.99	3.22	.93	3.01	.63
2. I am interested in improving my reading skills.	1.89	.71	2.00	.86	1.77	.81
3. I do not understand human sexuality well.	4.04	.79	3.81	.86	3.54	.89
4. I expect that my class assignments will be fully explained to me.	3.09	1.18	3.29	1.06	2.75	1.09
5. UMCP is considered a party school.	3.10	1.08	2.68	1.03	2.85	1.02
6. I am interested in seeking counseling regarding emotional/ social concerns.	3.32	1.11	3.11	1.04	2.90	1.09
7. I am interested in improving my writing skills.	2.31	1.21	2.60	1.36	2.06	1.01
8. Chances are good that I will at some time drop out temporarily before I complete a bachelor's degree.	3.93	1.08	3.74	1.08	3.25	1.23
9. I expect to be able to find a parking space if I drive on campus.	3.33	1.17	3.46	1.17	3.06	1.24

* Based on a 5 point Likert scale, 1= Strongly agree to 5 = Strongly disagree.

All differences significant at .05, using Analy of Variance.

Table 2

Significant Differences* in Attitude Items by Sex

Item	Male Mean	Male S.D.	Female Mean	Female S.D.
1. I expect to paraticipate in some form of intramural athletics at the University.	2.06	1.12	2.68	1.22
2. The University should actively recruit black students.	3.18	1.03	3.03	.93
3. I know how to use a library well.	2.38	.88	2.67	.96
4. I expect that my class assignments will be fully explained to me.	3.16	1.09	3.32	1.06
5. I am interested in counseling regarding educational-vocational plans.	2.33	.99	2.41	.89
6. I feel most instructors will act like they care about students.	3.22	1.09	3.47	1.14
7. Getting a good grade in a course is more important to me than the content of the course.	3.24	1.04	3.38	.93
8. UMCP is considered a party school.	2.65	1.05	2.79	1.03
9. UMCP is known mostly for its athletic teams.	2.84	.99	3.03	.95
0. I would prefer to commute rather than live on campus.	3.28	1.28	3.44	1.27
1. I am interested in improving my writing skills.	2.47	1.25	2.63	1.42
2. I closely follow one or more UMCP athletic teams.	2.69	1.18	3.05	1.06
3. Financial aid should be given more often based on merit instead of need.	2.91	1.16	3.10	1.20
4. I expect to be able to find a parking space if I drive on campus.	3.26	1.18	3.59	1. 14

* Based on a 5 point Likert scale, 1= strongly agree to 5= strongly disagree.

All differences significant at .05, using analysis of variance.

Table 3

Significant Differences* in Attitude Items by Race by Sex

Item	Black				White				Other			
	Male		Female		Male		Female		Male		Female	
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
1. The University should actively recruite black students.	1.78	.90	2.18	1.01	3.28	.98	3.15	.87	3.12	.65	2.90	.61
2. I am interested in counseling regarding educational/vocational plans.	3.59	1.46	3.46	1.40	3.32	1.44	3.49	1.33	3.67	1.47	3.00	1.31

*Based on a 5 point Likert scale, 1= strongly agree ,to 5= strongly disagree.

All differences significant at .05, using analysis of variance.